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## Unveiling Women Marginalization in *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Mohammed Hanif

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### Abstract

*The present study pursues the primaevael customs of patriarchy and its tormenting effects happening in the lives of women in Pakistan. The purpose of this research is to explore how patriarchal traditions, class differences, and their triple marginalization in the novel played chaos in the lives of females. Though the existing status of women is traditionally much better than that of women in the West but still they are not empowered and are deprived of basic rights. GC Spivak provides the theoretical foundations for this research through her theory, can the subaltern speak (1988). This research is based on qualitative textual analysis. The present study explores the status of women in Pakistan through the characterization of various female characters in the novel. This study concludes that they are portrayed as compliant and deserted beings deprived of every kind of individualism.*

**Key Words:** Stagnant, Stereotype, Subaltern, Marginalization, Resistance

### Introduction

The story of the novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by Mohammed Hanif revolves around Alice Bhatti, the leading lady of the novel. She is the only daughter of a Christian janitor, Joseph Bhatti. When the novel commences, we come to know her as a junior nurse at the *Sacred Heart Hospital for All Ailment* in Karachi. In the novel, she is triply marginalized on the basis of her religion, gender and social class. Hanif has represented Alice Bhatti as stagnant stereotyping Pakistani woman victims of religious, cultural and social violence. In every phase of life, she suffers perpetual agony and humiliation. From the very beginning of the novel, we encounter her in a grimy condition. Being an estranged woman, she is continuously exploited by extremist groups of society. The general public show hatred, and she also faces laxity from state institutions. She is deprived of her basic privileges in jobs. Religious minorities are

labelled as untouchables; therefore, people limit their interaction with them. Apart from this, the government also shows the least precedence to provide security to religious minorities.

When she was a young child, her mother, who was working in her master's house, was raped and brutally stabbed. So, since childhood, she became acquainted with agonies. At the time of getting her training at nursing school, she physically attacked a surgeon as a nurse and was sent to *Borstal Jail for Women and Children*. While getting a job as a nurse in Sacred Hospital, she was treated like an alienated woman by senior doctors who frequently remind her that she is from untouchables. There she encounters senior sister Hina Alvi. She often supervised her on how she should handle different situations, whether it's related to her profession or domestic life. At the same hospital, she also meets an errand boy Noor and

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his sick mother, who is also admitted to Sacred. Noor also works in the Sacred Hospital as an office boy of different doctors. Noor and his mother spend some time at Borstal Jail, so Alice is fairly acquainted with them. Another two characters are introduced in the novel that is Teddy Butt and inspector Malangi. Professionally both are interdependent; inspector Malangi is a leader of a heinous group, and Teddy works under his supervision. He became acquainted with Alice in Sacred Hospital and instantly fell in love with her, and consequently, they got married. While performing her duty once, she was in the VIP room at Sacred, where an old landlady Beguim Qazalbash is admitted. And the son of that old woman compelled her for oral sex, and she slashed his penis with a razor.

### Literature Review

Feminist postcolonial theorist Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's work, *Can the Subaltern Speak* (1988), provides the theoretical underpinnings for this research. Spivak's perceptions regarding subalternity are meticulously linked with women who distressed in the name of sex, doctrine and a specific group of society.

In her essay, the term 'speak' has a special significance. By the word speaking, she signifies abound among a speaker and a receiver. It is further explained that whenever subaltern attempts to start speaking, meanwhile the message that they want to transfer immediately becomes slanted. It obviously indicates that others are not ready to give them heed, and it occurs in an incessant manner. Consequently, the communication system flops, and no contract take place for these subalterns. People try to ignore their appeals. There is a flow of discrepancy existing in our society because subalterns cannot communicate with others. Only the colonizer had the voice, and they can speak while subalterns were exposed to the colonial rule, and they determined by the category of 'other' that means they don't have a voice their own. However, it is more pathetic on the part of subalterns that afterwards the colonial rule; the elite upper class again subordinated these subalterns. And the condition of subaltern women remains to the worst, and there is a minute possibility for advancement.

Spivak further explains her contentious speech 'the subaltern cannot speak' in an interview with the editors of *The Spivak Reader*, that as "it means that even when the subaltern makes an effort to the death to speak, she is not able to be heard, and speaking and hearing complete the speech act. That's what it had meant, and anguishes marked the spot" (Spivak, 1996, p. 292). Tharu & Lalita (1991), the editors of *Women Writing in India*, give a special emphasis on collecting the workings of other female authors and done an excellent job with their existence and as well as their margins. A tragic widow dilemma is evoked when her husband dies. It looks as the messenger and the god of death themselves comes and snatch her soul because the wife agony begins thus. No one amid the family members has the right to take off her ornaments even though nobody can touch her body. To the barber cast, this task is allocated from three to six women will act this job. Even though often it happens that as soon as the husband breathe lasts among these female monsters exactly jumped upon her body and brutally tore up all her adornments from her body. Sometimes, in haste, the gentle bones of her nose and ears break in the process. These cruel women don't have the patience to take off the ornaments one after another. Occasionally it occurs that pulling stuff from her hair violently, clusters of hair are also removed from her scalp. They fix her hands-on earth with pins and try to break down the bracelets with a large stone. Even though these heartless women do not leave a six or seven years old girl, who doesn't know the meaning of husband when he died, and she becomes a widow! (Tharu & Lalita, 1991)

Arendt (1978) says that the place allotted to a woman in any genre of literature is just like searching them in the marginalia of the page or in the footnotes that obviously depict their position in the mindset of these scholars and furthermore for these thinkers, their presence and absence are parallel.

Margery Fee (1995) called these experiences "the unfair diplomacies and stereotyping glamorization" (Margery, 1995, p. 104), where the role of females are sentimentalized and mythologized. Similarly, Jones (2011) claims that all experiences like social, cultural, civil and religious are implied to hypothesis differences as well as freezes

people in substitute of subsidiarity ([Jones, 2011, p. 211](#)).

### Research Methodology

In this study, the qualitative research procedure has been applied to highlight the various aspects of the novel *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* by [Hanif \(2011\)](#). The researcher critically evaluated the novel as the primary source for investigation. The theoretical framework that the researcher has chosen for this study is [Spivak's model \(1988\)](#), *can the subalterns speak* has thematically evaluated the methodology of feminism. As a confirmation for strengthening arguments, references are provided from the text for additional analyses. This part of the research methodology is based on textual analysis of the selected text from the novel. All the references from the text have been textually analyzed along with the key concept of subalternity. It also illustrates the status of women in Pakistan. Alice's character is placed for observation to get an in-depth examination of the existing position of an estranging group of the society.

### The Situation of a Marginalized Woman

Three females' characters are introduced in the novel as Alice Bhatti, the protagonist of the novel: Hina Alvi, the senior nurse and Zenab, the sick mother of the errand boy Noor. Being the leading lady of the novel, Alice's character is vividly drawn by Hanif as compare to Hina Alvi's character sketch while Zenab is placed in thick shadow. Anyhow, whether it is Alice, Hina Alvi or Zenab but they all have the same story. However, we can say that it's the journey of every downtrodden woman in our society. They are exploited in the name of religion, male-treated, considered as inferiors, insecure from the law, suffering from professional anxiety, having matrimonial complications, beaten by their spouses for minor mistakes and sometimes assaulted with acids.

Hanif represents these three characters in his current novel to describe the status of women in three different dimensions. Let us commence our discussion with Noor's mother, Zenab, who is a sick lady and suffering from many kinds of diseases. And Zenab is completely dependent upon her son Noor,

who is only thirteen years old, quite young to took care of his mother. This is one dimension of women in our society.

The other dimension is Hina Alvi. She is depicted as a worthless being in her first appearance. During Alice's interview, her existence is not considered deferential. In the interview, she is not taking participation in any activity while the male panels are negotiating with Alice. Her only contribution is that *"Licking the crimson juice occasionally dripping from the corner of her mouth"* ([Hanif, 2011, p. 4](#)).

Sister Hina Alvi is also a dejected and divorced lady. Like Alice Bhatti, she is also a Christian. At the beginning of the novel, she is introduced, for instance, a low-ranking woman at Sacred Heart Hospital in Karachi that is called a nurse in the medical profession. Therefore, senior male doctors are accustomed to treat these nurses with contempt and symbolize them like *"garbage bins in uniforms"* ([Hanif, 2011, p. 257](#)). This shows the nasty mentality of the male gender of society.

The third dimension, which is in the limelight, is Alice Bhatti, the protagonist in the novel, but we should also keep in minds that this is not only all about Alice Bhatti, though it is the journey of every downtrodden woman living within the boundary of Pakistan. Alice Bhatti is a charming lady who belongs to the poor class of society. In every step of life, she is constantly humiliated. As Hanif states, *"Life has taught Alice Bhatti that every little step forwarded in life is preceded by ritual humiliation. Every little happiness asks for a down payment"* ([Hanif, 2011, p. 82](#)). Every stage of delight asks for massive payment *"Too many humiliations and a journey that goes in circles mean that her fate is permanently in the red"* ([Hanif, 2011, p.82](#)).

Apart from this, Alice Bhatti also encounters great challenges as being a person from the working-class belongs to a busy city of Pakistan. She cannot afford a private vehicle; therefore, she involuntarily walked in marketplaces and sometimes moved in vans. She deprived of relative protection. She faced sexual harassment at every turn of her life. Sometimes she perceived her physical beauty as a curse as it attracted the wrong man that made her more vulnerable. They rolled their eyeballs upward,

downward and sometimes they looked sideways to pretend that they took interest in her and stared always at her breasts. As Hanif writes: *“that whatever their status in life, whatever they are selling her, whatever they might need from her, they always have a reason to stare at her, size her up and then zero in on her breasts”* (Hanif, 2011, p. 321)

She always lingered outside her home for various reasons and thus spent much of her time in public spaces where the culture of chauvinism has prevailed that is described by the writer in these words, *“Lewd gestures, whispered suggestions, uninvited hands on her bottom are all part of Alice Bhatti’s daily existence”*. (Hanif, 2011, p. 14)

Instead of this sexual harassment, Hanif also highlights the socially created condition of women in a hostile environment like Pakistan, where male integrity and self-respect is tangled with women’s physique. They consider it their utmost privilege to treat them as their sole property. It is insane that instead of being human, they determine them as an object of entertainment with no personal sentiments. In the name of love and honor, women are murdered in Hanif’s fictive world. Being a male member of society, they consider marginalization is the status of women. They think that it is their natal right to raid each contract centered on womenfolk. They are suffocated to death by their family, a ditched lover, a farmer, a politician, society etc. They are fatalities of domestic exploitation as well as their bodies are used for supplies and to be interchanged. The custom of matrimony in some areas appears as commodities that have a price. These kinds of deals are considered appropriate in alleged reasons of tradition, and they are traded to the uppermost purchaser irrespective of his age and personality (Noor, 2004). A woman is considered as a commodity, a part of possessions that are returned in society which continues to organize her body. She is also presented as blood money to compensate for murder, for loss to lifecycle and material goods. However, another marriage transaction that is called *watta satta*, in which a woman is exchanged by another. In this transaction of women, a man achieves a wife by donating another woman that belongs to him, whether a daughter or a sister (Ali, 2001). This point is further elaborated by Hanif (2011) in the novel:

Suspicious husband, brother protecting his honor, father protecting his honor, son protecting his honor, jilted lover avenges his honor, feuding farmer settling their water disputes, moneylenders collecting their interests: most of life’s arguments, it seemed, got settled by ding various things to a woman’s body. A woman was something you could get a loose change in a deal made on a street corner (p. 142).

Hanif had drawn a comparison when he wrote her name and her husband name; there a huge difference found. Throughout the novel, Teddy is announced as Teddy Butt with his exact name, considered a respectable and decent individual of the society though he is also from a lower family like Alice, but he is given respect while Alice is often pronounced as ‘sister Alice,’ or ‘daughter Alice’. The society cannot acknowledge her as an independent individual having a particular identity but only knows her by the role she performs as the writer declares, *“Mostly people call her ‘daughter’ or ‘sister’ and then do exactly what they would do with their own sisters and daughters: they treat her like a slave they bought at a clearance sale”* (Hanif, 2011, p. 122).

When she was doing her duty in Sacred hospital, she was accustomed to the treatment of women like shooting, hacked, stifled, infected, scorched, dangled or buried alive. As Hanif says, *“There was a murder in every kitchen; sometimes there was a murderer even when there was no kitchen in the house, sometimes even when there was no house, no boundary wall, and no roof”* (Hanif, 2011, p. 142).

Hanif has stereotyped Alice and all women in the novel as a prepaid and lifetime servant. Furthermore, they are brought by men in the deal of marriage who gives to birth their children, prepare foodstuffs, and fulfil their sexual hunger and execute all the prepaid multipurpose activities. For a long time, women have been considered a cook, a breeder and a whore while the image of men has been connected with a cruel and merciless masters.

Most fatal fact which she learned that there was no police case, no investigators hearing everywhere coordinating evidence, definitely not a governmental committee involved to discuss techniques for protecting threatened class. It is as predictable as in the month of March there will be no rain at all. Every act seemed pre-planned as the novelist writes,

“...nobody was surprised; there were no police detectives sitting around matching clues, no parliamentary subcommittees discussing ways of saving this endangered species” (Hanif, 2011, p. 143). This kind of illustration of females belittled position. They are revealed as dummies and men are there to tighten up their cords. They are neglected being. No one care for them, they have beaten, jerked and now and then bounded. There is no law; no politics, no religion, no culture and tradition to secure them but all are exist for the deterioration of women. In the Postcolonial societies, women are doubly marginalized in colonial era and in postcolonial period by their masculine fellows.

An intellectual person is often knotted into a handsome fantasy that is called love. Alice as being a devastated human thought love is a gleam of hope. She was considered an insulted woman with no background, an object of male fantasy. Therefore, all the way through in her life she was demoralized as additionally added by Hanif that she often has a “wrong type of attraction” (Hanif, 2011, p. 144) but again he says, “and she doesn’t want to be that kind of woman” (Hanif, 2011, p. 144).

The concept of peace and security is attached to matrimonial life however, for Alice it was a survival tactic. Though she wanted marriage for a respectable status in society to conceal her from impious stares of men, but these efforts became fruitless. In the whirl of patriarchy, she takes this decision. She is craving and searching which takes her to Teddy Butt and a triply marginalized subaltern is further victimized. The irony of situation and fate mocked and laughed at her useless exertion reached the center. Alice’s savior turned into a killer. In a patriarchal civilization, men perform their role such as a slaughterer, capitalizer and a dictator. Her insistent wisdom compelled her to elect a killer among these criminals.

## Conclusion

From honest scrutiny of the script, *Our Lady of Alice Bhatti* (2011), it is revealed that women face various

bleak facets of society such as; alienation, traumas, insecurities and sufferings of women. Apart from this, the novel also interprets the attitudes and behaviors of society with females. The present study discusses the imperative features connected to the existence of women. This novel has taken into consideration the patriarchal norms in a quite convincing way to expose these norms successfully. The social segregation of minorities and the hypocritical approach of the people are vividly depicted in the present study. The novel is critically evaluating their lack of concerns, shams, conventions, selfishness, indifferences towards the complications associated with the economically browbeaten class of the society and particularly women. The dominant groups kept them at the edge and always exploited them. It is Hanif’s keen observation to highlight in quite a convincing way the scrape of females and the demeanours that how their legal privileges are seized. To evade every awkward situation, women adopt preventive measures and techniques to protect themselves from men libidinous orientation and to make them less prominent.

The novel also reflects violence against women from the description of Alice’s mother story when she lost her life and when Alice was involuntarily forced for oral sex with a landlady’s son. It is more than ostensible that females undergo interminable torments, glumness, and menaces occasionally by their family members and sometimes by the unknowns. It is also evident from the analysis of the novel that men are determined to shatter women’s peace of mind. It seems that the age-long system of the world is premeditated for the men and also by the men. The roots of patriarchy are strong, like be a tough nut for the women to smash and to find them gladly adjusting in it. In the above discourse, we have successfully crumpled the delusion of males’ superiority over females by divulging their hypocrisy, brutalities, lust, perversion etc.

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